



Trail Talk

Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guide Program

Trail Talk Volume 14, Issue 6

Helping Cavity Nesting Birds at Mission Trails by Richard Griebel, MTRP Nest Box Project Volunteer

Are you ever curious about the bird houses seen around the Park? These wooden boxes provide homes for cavity-nesting birds that reproduce in the park. Dead trees that might otherwise be used by nesters are often removed because they are unsightly or become safety hazards, possibly falling on people. Without suitable nest sites, certain birds will not reproduce. Our man-made "cavities" provide alternates to their natural homes.

In early spring, boxes are cleaned and made ready for the March through June nesting season. Last March ten volunteers began weekly observation of 73 boxes in the Park recording nesting activities: nest building, egg laying, feeding babies and finally young fledging.

While most of the activity is routine, every year produces surprises. This year a box was relocated to a tree behind Kumeyaay Lake. Within days a pair of Tree Swallows claimed the box, chasing other birds and humans

defending their newly-occupied home. Tree Swallows frequently nest in the

use Mission Trails Park as its breeding ground. Fourteen flycatcher pairs raised

53 babies which will migrate south with their parents in the fall, hopefully surviving to return to the Park the following spring.

In 2009 monitors recorded a total of 216 young birds fledging compared to only 112 in 2008 and 163 in 2007. The variation in nesting success is only partially explained by annual rainfall which was a little below average for the rain year ending in July but significantly

higher than the two previous years. This year promises to be a record year for birds fledging with a higher than

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Photos by Wendy Esterly

Park but 2009 was the first time they used a nest box, fledging four young. House Wrens are the dominant species finding the Park's habitat ideal with 35 nests producing 155 young. The second most common nester, the Ash-throated Flycatcher, migrates from Baja and central Mexico to

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Writers wanted...

- Have an interesting story or photo you'd like to share with other Trail Guides? Send them to 'Trail Talk' editor Millie Basden at trailtalkeditor@yahoo.com. Please include "Trail Talk" in the subject line!

Speakers Needed...

- Have you heard an interesting speaker or know an interesting topic that would be appropriate for one of our monthly meetings? If so, please send your ideas to Brian or Ondina Moehl.



Next Trail Guide
Monthly Meeting:

Wednesday,

June 9th

6:30 pm—

Visitor Center
Classroom

Monthly Meeting Minutes—May 12, 2010

There were 49 Trail Guides, 3 guests, and Ranger Heidi in attendance.

Fred's number for May was "about 4000." The answer in the form of a question is "How many species of parasitic plants are there world-wide?" This number was taken from an article in the Quest section of the May 10th *Union-Tribune*. Fred reported that after reading the article, he found a web site devoted to parasitic plants, which put the number at 4409: www.parasiticplants.siu.edu (accessed 5/12/10).

Fred reminded Trail Guides to sign up for walks and record the number of visitors and some interesting observations from the walk, including how

visitors learned about the walk.

Fred announced the prize winners for the best walk write-up in April: Rudy Spano and Michele Ruppert for their VC walk on April 21.

Fred asked for volunteers to do the kiosk display for July–September and later ones. Anyone interested should contact Fred.

Fred mentioned that the discovery tables program was just about ready to get started. He asked for volunteers to sign up for discovery table topics and give a preview at a Trail Guide meeting. He gave a brief demonstration for a discovery table on animal skulls.

Chris Axtmann reported she was going

to update and correct MTRP listings on the new Events Calendar on the Signon San Diego web site.

Program was a presentation by Bill Howell titled "Insect Sex – 2nd Edition."

Upcoming Events

Wildlife Tracking Walk with Mike Gibbs, Saturday, June 5, 8:30–10:30 a.m. Meet at Kumeyaay Lake Campground entry station.

The next meeting is June 9, 2010, 6:30 p.m. in the Visitor Center classrooms. The program is a presentation by Bill White on San Diego Regional History.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda L. Kramer, Secretary

Cavity Nesting Birds

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average number of boxes being occupied.

Upon completing her first season as a monitor, Rachael Borders summarized her experience by commenting, "The nest box project is a wonderful experience for anyone who enjoys seeing nature in action. From seeing the mother incubating tiny

eggs one week to hearing the little chirps of the baby birds the next week, and then before you know it, the fledglings have flown off on their own, completing the cycle."

People interested in becoming a volunteer monitor next year or willing to construct nest boxes for the project can contact Ranger Heidi at the Visitors Center for more information.



How Many Nests Can One Sycamore Hold? by Millie Basden, photo by Peter Thomas, Trail Guides

The nest boxes mounted in MTRP are not the only places that birds nest in the park. Nests of different forms built by various species of birds can be observed during the breeding season. The Phainopepla in the photo built its cup nest in a sycamore within ten feet of the trail that goes from Old Mission Dam towards Oak Canyon.

We watched as the male and female took turns bringing twigs and placing them carefully in the crook of a branch that was about six feet above the ground. A few weeks later, we returned



and watched the parents feed three hungry nestlings. In the same sycamore, a Western Kingbird was sitting on its cup nest about ten feet above the Phainopepla's nest. Above the Kingbird's nest and on the opposite side of the sycamore's trunk, a pair of Bullock's Orioles were coming and going from their woven, bag-shaped nest that dangled from a branch. The contents of the nest were concealed, but we hope that several young were inside. So the answer to the question is: one sycamore can hold at least three nests of three different species.

Trail Guide Trek to Silverwood by Marcia Stoner, Trail Guide

The San Diego Audubon's Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary was the meeting place for the Sunday, May 2nd, Trail Guide hike with family and friends. We were anxious to begin the hike with the promise of many birds and abundant flora after a wet spring season. None of us expected to start the trek with "ants in our pants," though, as one member did, because she posed for the group photo too near an ant hill. She remained calm knowing, at least, they weren't the biting kind of ants.

Our members were excited to identify plants we hadn't seen at MTRP, such as the Indian Pink, known not for the color pink but rather for the jagged edges on the red flower resembling the cuts of pinking shears, cat's ear, silver lotus huddling on the rock crevices, small yellow sun cups, seep monkey flowers in the wet meadowlands known as the Cienaga and delicate, powdery silverback fern. We were delighted and amused by the names we heard for several others, such as wooly marbles, golden eardrops, Danny's skullcap, and Turkish rigging. Amusing but appropriate, we decided.

After hiking the Sunset Trail, we looked for the often-sighted snakes near the picnic tables, but we weren't fortunate enough to see any. However, many birds joined us for lunch, such as the white breasted nuthatch, western blue bird, black-headed grosbeak, California quail, and Costa's hummingbird.

We departed savoring the nature opportunities we had observed and looking forward to next month's hike on June 12th at Oakoasis Preserve at 10:00 a.m. Come join us!



Photo by Fred Kramer



Photo by Stacey Miller

A Mother's Day Surprise by George Varga, photo by Nancy Varga, Trail Guides



Just before taking Nancy out to breakfast on Mother's Day I decided to pull some invasive thistles on the other side of our backyard fence. I had been working about ten minutes, making great progress, and was moving toward another clump. Suddenly from almost underfoot a quail shot out from beneath old vegetation scaring the goulash (or life) out of me. I looked down and there, just barely visible from the top, I could see a few eggs. Quickly moving away from the nest, I got a better view from the side. As the parent quail had actually flown the proverbial coop, I took the opportunity to take some pictures of the nest. For the next few days we very carefully observed the nest and were relieved to see that the quail was back and taking care of the eggs. On Thursday, 13 May, Nancy once again approached the nest with great stealth and was able to photograph the quail actually sitting on the nest. Hopefully we will see the chicks before we head off to the North Rim.

This is tick season. Please remind the people on your walks to check for ticks afterwards.

What's Happening at the Park

Friday, June 11...

Stars at Mission Trails—Join members of the San Diego Astronomy Association from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground's Day Use Parking Lot. Telescopes available (weather permitting.)

Saturday, June 12...

Wildlife Wood Carving Demonstration—Del Herbert, a world champion wildlife and decoy wood carver will be demonstrating his artistic talents in the Visitor Center lobby from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday, June 19...

Guided Bird Walk—Join Trail Guide Jeanne Raimond for an adventure in bird watching! This month: Visitor Center Loop—meet in front of the Visitor Center. 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Summer Twilight Walk—Our Trail Guide Summer Twilight Walks kick-off this season at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground entry station. 7:15 p.m.

Saturday, June 26...

Birding Basics—Resident birder Winona Sollock will teach 5 simple techniques for identifying birds at a glance. 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Visitor Center.

Saturday, July 3...

Tracking Walk—Join MTRP Trail Guide and Tracking Team member Mike Gibbs and discover signs left behind by resident creatures. Meet at the Visitor Center, 8:30 a.m.



Adult and two young Great Horned Owls which nested at Silverwood this spring. Photo by Wendy Esterly.



www.mtrp.org



If you can't do a walk you signed-up for, arrange for someone to take your place or let Fred or Ranger Heidi know you won't be there.

When on a summer's morn I wake,
And open my two eyes,
Out to the clear, born-singing rills
My bird-like spirit flies.

To hear the Blackbird, Cuckoo, Thrush,
Or any bird in song;
And common leaves that hum all day
Without a throat or tongue.

And when Time strikes the hour for sleep,
Back in my room alone,
My heart has many a sweet bird's song -
And one that's all my own.

- W. H. Davies, *When on a Summer's Morn*

Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guide Program

President—Fred Kramer
VP (Programs)—Brian & Ondina Moehl
Secretary—Linda Kramer
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Ranger Liaison—Heidi Gutknecht
Training Program Director—Bill Howell
Trail Talk Editor—Millie Basden
Trail Talk Production—Tom Walters
Trail Talk Distribution—Ed Bailey
Trail Talk Photographer—Wendy Esterly



The Trail Guide Program is dedicated to provide the visiting public with education and understanding of the unique environmental and historical attributes of Mission Trails Regional Park. The Trail Guides supplement the Park Rangers in outreach programs to the public.
Contact Information:

MTRP Visitor Center—619-668-3281

Ranger Heidi Gutknecht—619-668-3279

Fred Kramer—fred.kramer@cox.net

Millie Basden—trailtalkeditor@yahoo.com

Tom Walters—twalters@ucsd.edu

Brian Moehl—bmoehl@att.net

Ondina Moehl—omoehl@hotmail.com